

Friendship and Aristotle's Defense of Psychological Eudaimonism

(Pre-Print Draft)

Abstract

Aristotle holds that the ultimate goal of our action is our own happiness (“psychological eudaimonism”). Though this position is controversial, it’s widely thought that he never attempts to defend it. I argue, to the contrary, that he does. I begin by pointing out that in *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.8 Aristotle raises an endoxic challenge to psychological eudaimonism—namely, that virtuous people act selflessly, especially in relation to their friends—and that he responds to this challenge by declaring that the (observable) “facts” disagree with these popular “speeches.” I then argue that some of the facts that he has in mind can be found in his surrounding discussion of friendship. Specifically, I point to two observations in the *Nicomachean* account of friendship that suggest that friendship isn’t a source of selfless motivation for virtuous people—that friendship dissolves with distance and that friends do not wish their friends to become gods—and one observation that suggests that virtuous friends do not benefit each other selflessly tout court—that friendship requires an equal return of benefit in order to preserve itself.

I

It is widely thought that Aristotle holds each person’s own happiness (*eudaimonia*) to be the ultimate goal of his action (“psychological eudaimonism”).¹ But psychological eudaimonism is

¹ See *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter “NE”) 1.7.1097a34-b6, 3.1.1101b35-1102a4. There have been some challenges to this picture of Aristotle’s ethical thought—for example, Richard Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) and Suzanne Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle’s Philosophy of Friendship* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). Kraut’s principle challenge is that Aristotle’s claim that friends benefit their friends “for the sake of their friend” implies that they do not benefit their friends for the sake of themselves; see *Human Good*, 78, bottom paragraph; compare Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle’s Philosophy of Friendship*, 65, second paragraph; Roger Crisp, “Nobility in the *Nicomachean Ethics*,” *Phronesis* 59 (2014): 240-1. However, the fact that one acts for the sake of another does not imply that one is not acting for the sake of oneself. One could always pursue the happiness of another as an integral part of one’s own happiness. On this point, see Kelly Rogers, “Aristotle on Loving Another for His Own Sake,” *Phronesis* 39 (2014): 300-302.

Besides offering similar reasoning about acting “for the sake of one’s friend,” Stern-Gillet bases her challenge around the claim that the traditional reading doesn’t accord with the fact that the virtuous person sometimes chooses to lay down his life while performing noble (*kalon*) actions (*Friendship*, 104, bottom paragraph, 114-5). While she is aware that Aristotle describes these cases as the virtuous person choosing great goods for themselves in the form of noble actions (see 70), she claims that, since noble actions are “good

controversial. Most obviously, it implies that selfless action is impossible for a human being. This is because, to act selflessly, one must at least (a) fail to aim ultimately at his own happiness or (b) if one is aiming ultimately at his own happiness, be acting in such a way that he would still perform the same action even if he thought it would take him farther from happiness.² But psychological eudaimonism forbids both of these things.³ Given the position's controversial character, we cannot help but wonder how Aristotle defends it. The surprising answer of many scholars is that he never does. David Bostock, for example, writes:

Aristotle simply takes it to be *obvious* both that each man ought to pursue what is good (for him) and that each man does in fact pursue what (he thinks) is good (for him). The truth is that both these claims are controversial (and, I would say, false), but since Aristotle *does not recognize this* he offers us *no arguments* in their favor.⁴

If we ask in response why Aristotle would assume psychological eudaimonism without defending it, we will almost certainly be told that it was Ancient Greek common sense. Unlike us, the Greeks didn't consider psychological eudaimonism to be controversial. It consequently didn't

simply" (*agathon haplōs*) or as she prefers to translate it "good unconditionally," they are good "independently of individuals preferences, wants, or needs" (69) and therefore cannot be the object of "an individual's egoistic desire" (same page as above; compare 71). It would take me beyond the scope of this paper to address her case in detail, but let me briefly indicate why I take a different view. Pace Stern-Gillet, for something to be "good simply" isn't for it to be good without being "good for" anyone; rather, it's for it to be good for people who are in a good condition (see *Eudemian Ethics* [hereafter "EE"] 6.2.1235b30-1236a7, 1237a3-5; compare NE 3.4.1113a22-29). Therefore, the fact that virtuous people aim at something that is good simply doesn't imply that they aren't aiming at it because they think it's good for themselves; in fact, Aristotle seems to say the opposite: the good things that each person loves and cares about are those that are good for themselves; see NE 8.2.1155b17-25; EE 6.2.1236b37-8.

² It's helpful to distinguish between "altruistic" and "selfless" action. Altruistic action only requires that one is aiming at the good of another in a non-instrumental way—that is, that one does not aim at their good merely for the sake of some further thing. Thus, it's possible to act altruistically while failing to act selflessly (for an example, see the previous note). Indeed, this is what I take the common observation that Aristotle combines egoism and altruism to amount to.

³ Perhaps an exception should be made for akratic or "weak-willed" actions. Aristotle's account of akratic action (if, for him, it warrants the term "action") is notoriously difficult. He seems to offer two accounts; one in which the akratic does not actually realize that he is doing something he should not (NE 7.3.1146b31-1147a24); the other in which the akratic is determined to act by a non-rational desire and not the more rational part of himself (NE 7.3.1147a24-b5; compare NE 9.8.1168b34-5). On this point, see John Burnet, *The Ethics of Aristotle* (London: Methuen and Company, 1900), 301, note to paragraph 9.

⁴ *Aristotle's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 228, my emphasis.

strike Aristotle—or any other Ancient Greek philosopher for that matter—as requiring a defense.⁵ As Terence Irwin puts it:

The assumption that happiness (*eudaimonia*) is the ultimate end for action is not a paradoxical Socratic claim. According to Aristotle’s account of common ethical views, *we all agree* that our ultimate end is happiness. The *main* ethical question is *not* about whether we take happiness as the ultimate end, but about how to achieve happiness.⁶

I have argued elsewhere that this picture of Ancient Greek common sense is wrong.⁷

Psychological eudaimonism was controversial in Aristotle’s time just as it is in ours. In this paper, I will argue that, as a result, he does attempt to defend it.⁸ I cannot hope to fully lay out

⁵ This is a common view. See Sidgwick, *Outlines of The History of Ethics* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1967), 56; *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th edition (London: MacMillan and Company, 1907), xix; Arthur Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 249-253; Bernard Williams, “The Legacy of Greek Philosophy,” in *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 40-1; “Plato against the Immoralist,” in *Sense*, 102; Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 11-12, 43-4, 329, 440; “From Nature to Happiness,” *Apeiron* 31 (1998): 70; “Plato’s Defense of Justice: The Wrong Kind of Reason?,” in *The Quest for the Good life: Ancient Philosophers on Happiness*, ed. Øyvind Rabbås, Eyjólfur K. Emilsson, Hallvard Fossheim, and Miira Tuominen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 50, 52; C. C. W. Taylor, “Platonic Ethics,” in *Pleasure, Mind, and Soul: Selected Papers in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 152; James Doyle, “Socratic Methods,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 42 (2012): 55-6. For some dissenting voices, see Edward Meredith Cope, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle with a Commentary*, vol. 2 (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 147, note 12; Kenneth Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett, 1995), 114, 172, 296, 299, 301, bottom paragraph; Gregory Salmieri, “Aristotle on Selfishness?: Understanding the Iconoclasm of Nicomachean Ethics ix 8,” *Ancient Philosophy* 34 (2014): 103, first paragraph.

⁶ *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study*, vol. 1: *From Socrates to the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 22, my emphasis. See, also, *Plato’s Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 263; *Plato’s Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 32-3.

⁷ See Guy Schuh, “Was Eudaimonism Ancient Greek Common Sense?,” forthcoming in *Apeiron*.

⁸ Some other scholars have made claims in this territory. Salmieri (“Selfishness?”) thinks that Aristotle defends his claim that acting virtuously is (always) in an individual’s best interest by arguing that being virtuous is a precondition for having a well-defined “interest” in the first place (115-6), though this more directly relates to the question of whether Aristotle defends the *normative* claim that we should do what brings us closest to happiness (see 102-3). Is he thinking of NE 9.41166b13-29? This passage depicts vice as a psychologically divided (and therefore, bad) condition, though at other times Aristotle seems to depict it as a psychologically *unified* but, for all that, wretched condition (see NE 7.8).

Jessica Moss thinks that Aristotle defines “good for someone” as what is, for them, an end (*Aristotle on the Apparent Good: Perception, Phantasia, Thought, and Desire* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012]), 33-5). It’s somewhat unclear whether she means (a) a psychological end—that is, the sort of thing one actually does or would pursue as an end or (b) a normative end—that is, the sort of thing that is worth pursuing as an end. If she means (a), then she could offer the following defense on behalf of Aristotle. Since to be good (for someone) is to be a psychological end (for them), for “x to be better than y” is for it to be to a greater degree a psychological end than y; and for x to be “best of all” is for it to be to the greatest degree a psychological end—in Aristotle’s language the most “final” or “end-like” (*teleion*) end (see NE 1.7.1097a28-30). But the ultimate goal of our action—if we have such a goal—would be our most end-like goal (see NE

here Aristotle's defense of psychological eudaimonism. I will focus on uncovering merely one part of that defense as it appears in the NE.⁹ If I persuade some readers that it is at least plausible that he defends psychological eudaimonism, I will consider this paper a success.

II

Aristotle begins the NE by positing each person's own happiness as the ultimate goal of their action.¹⁰ And since the goal of an action—its “final cause”—is something that explains it,¹¹ this makes happiness an “explanatory starting point” (*archē*) of our action.¹² We may think that the fact that he begins the work by laying down this principle is good evidence that he makes no attempt to justify it. But Aristotle is keenly aware of the difference between arguing from an assumed explanatory starting point and actually arguing for and establishing one. He brings this important difference to our attention as follows:

Let it not escape our notice that arguments from explanatory starting points are different from arguments to explanatory starting points, for Plato also used to raise this perplexity well and investigate it, whether the way is from the explanatory starting points or to them, just as in a racecourse, there is either the way from the judges to the boundary or the way back again.¹³

Therefore, the fact that he initially posits our own happiness as an explanatory starting point for our action and proceeds to “reason from” it in no way precludes that he will later attempt to

1.7.1097a30-4). Therefore, if we do have an ultimate goal, this goal would be our greatest good. And, in fact, Aristotle does argue that we have such a goal (see NE 1.7.1097a22-24, understand: ‘If there is only one end, this is our ultimate end and the best; if there are many (which there are, NE 1.7.1097a25-6), the ultimate end, and the best, would be all these together’). Therefore, this goal, whatever exactly it is, is our greatest good. But everyone agrees that our happiness is our greatest good (see NE 1.7.1097b2-3). Therefore, the ultimate goal of our action is our own happiness. This line of thought is promising, but there is a difficulty. In the NE at least, Aristotle seems to reject the (Academic) definition of good as a psychological end; see NE 1.6.1096b8-26, esp. b14-19 with 21-26.

⁹ I do not intend to suggest that other defenses could not be found in other works, say in the EE, but, for reasons I discuss in the next section (see note 34), the NE is the more obvious place to look for a defense of psychological eudaimonism.

¹⁰ See note 1.

¹¹ See *Metaphysics* 4.2.1013a32-5.

¹² See NE 1.12.1102a2-4; compare Plato, *Symposium* 205a1-4.

¹³ NE 1.4.1095a30-1095b1. Unless otherwise noted, translations from Greek are my own. I use I. Bywater's edition of the NE (*Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1894]).

“reason to” it as well. Indeed, the fact that he calls our attention to this crucial distinction, and praises Plato for making it before him, makes it all the more likely that he will at some point attempt to do so.

It is often said that Aristotle argues for his explanatory starting point by arguing for his definition of happiness.¹⁴ It is not unreasonable that, for Aristotle, the definition of happiness is an ethical explanatory starting point. However, we have also seen that he designates our own happiness—that is, in propositional form, that our own happiness is the ultimate goal of our action—as an explanatory starting point. Therefore, in addition to an argument for the definition of happiness, there is need for an argument for the proposition that our own happiness is the ultimate goal of our action. After all, someone could grant a given definition of happiness—for example, that it is theoretical contemplation—while at the same time denying that our own theoretical contemplation is our ultimate goal—in other words, denying that our own happiness has the status of an explanatory starting point. This is, for example, Kraut’s view.¹⁵ An argument that establishes that we act ultimately for the sake of our own happiness would thus play an important role in the project of justifying Aristotle’s ethical explanatory starting points.

Aristotle does in fact provide an argument for the principle that our own happiness is the ultimate end of our action in NE 9.8. He there mentions the following popular view about virtuous people:

It seems to people (*dokei*) that the vicious person does all things for the sake of himself, and by as much as he should be more vicious, by this much he does so more—and they reproach him for being the sort of person who does nothing apart from himself (*aph’*

¹⁴ For example, W.F.R. Hardie, *Aristotle’s Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 35, bottom paragraph, 37, bottom paragraph; C. D. C. Reeve, *Practices of Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 30, 59-60, 62, second paragraph; Dominic Scott, *Levels of Argument: A Comparative Study of Plato’s Republic and Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 166, 168-9.

¹⁵ See *Human Good*, 11, first paragraph. Reeve (*Practices*, 27-8) makes a similar point.

heautou—that is, apart from his own good)¹⁶—while the virtuous person acts because of what is noble (*to kalon*) and, by as much as he should be more virtuous, the more he does so, and for the sake of a friend, and *he disregards what concerns himself* (*to d' hautou pariēsin*—that is, disregards his own good).¹⁷

I take it that the act of “disregarding what concerns oneself” or “disregarding one’s own good” that is attributed to virtuous people above is equivalent to “acting selflessly.” It therefore shares the necessary condition I outlined above—namely, that either (a) one fails to aim ultimately at his own happiness or (b) if one does happen to be aiming ultimately at his own happiness, one would still perform the same action even if he thought it would take him farther from happiness—which condition, to repeat, is incompatible with psychological eudaimonism. Moreover, insofar as this view about the way that virtuous people act is a popular one, it qualifies as a “reputable opinion” (*endoxon*),¹⁸ which, for Aristotle, gives it evidentiary weight. It cannot, in other words, just be dismissed.¹⁹ The popular view that virtuous people act in disregard of their own good thus constitutes a credible challenge to Aristotle’s principle that our own happiness is the ultimate end of our action.²⁰

After unfolding this challenge to psychological eudaimonism, Aristotle responds to it. He declares that the popular “speeches” (*logoi*) about the selfless action of virtuous people “do not

¹⁶ There’s some dispute about the reading of this phrase (see René Antoine Gauthier and Jean Yves Jolif, *L’Éthique à Nicomaque*, vol. 2 [Louvain and Paris: Publications Universitaires and Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1958—1970], 745-6 for a helpful summary). Some, for example Burnet (*The Ethics*, 421), propose reading *apo* in a causative sense: ‘the vicious person does nothing on his own initiative.’ Note that “nothing” would have to be elliptical here for “nothing noble” since the vicious person clearly does things in his (at least, apparent) self-interest on his own initiative, but this elliptical reading is awkward because the idea of doing what is noble for its own sake isn’t introduced until after this phrase. For this reason, and also because of the context, I prefer the more traditional reading of *apo* in a locative sense: either the vicious person is blamed for doing nothing that “proceeds away from himself” or the vicious person is blamed for not doing anything that is “located away from himself.”

¹⁷ NE 9.8.1168a30-35, my emphasis.

¹⁸ See *Topics* 1.1.100b21-3.

¹⁹ See NE 7.1.1145b2-7; Michael Pakaluk, *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 25-7.

²⁰ Compare *Topics* 1.2.101a34-101b4. The issue of challenges to an explanatory starting point on the basis of reputable opinion is admirably discussed in C. D. C. Reeve, *Action, Contemplation, and Happiness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 61-3.

agree with the facts (or “deeds,” *erga*).”²¹ His response may appear to beg the question; that is, he may appear to simply presuppose that human beings act ultimately for the sake of their own happiness and, on the basis of this presupposition, deny that virtuous people act selflessly. But this is not correct. He justifies his rejection of the popular understanding of the virtuous person by an appeal to “the deeds” in explicit contrast to “the speeches.” This contrast implies that the claim that virtuous people disregard their own good—“the speeches”—does not match what can actually be observed about them—“the deeds.” In other words, he appeals to the observable deeds of virtuous people in contrast to the misleading speeches about them. And for this reason his response does not beg the question.

Aristotle’s response thus constitutes a genuine—that is, non-question-begging—argument for his explanatory starting point. In particular, it constitutes a “negative argument”—an attempted refutation of a credible view that contradicts a view we wish to support.²² But what exactly are these “deeds” or “facts”? And how can the listener or reader come to recognize them as facts? They are clearly not obvious to everyone, for, otherwise, there would not be an opposed view for Aristotle to respond to in the first place. The listener, or reader, is therefore likely to be in need of some guidance in order to recognize these facts. Does Aristotle provide this guidance?

This difficulty is often overlooked. “The facts” are often identified with the considerations that Aristotle lists following his claim that “the facts disagree with these speeches, and not unreasonably.”²³ These considerations are primarily (i) “people say” (*phasi*) that one should love one’s greatest friend most of all²⁴ and (ii) “all the proverbs agree” (*hai paroimiai de*

²¹ NE 9.8.1168a35-1168b1. For the evidentiary priority of “deeds” to “speeches,” see NE 10.8.1179a17-22.

²² See EE 1.3.1215a5-7; for more on negative arguments, see Reeve, *Action, Contemplation*, 63.

²³ NE 9.8.1168a35-b1.

²⁴ See NE 9.8.1168b1-2.

pasai homognōmonousin) in suggesting that each person is their own greatest friend.²⁵ However, these considerations explain his “and not unreasonably” (*ouk alogōs*), not his “facts” or “deeds.” They are, after all, more “speeches.” His point is that there are other popular views that suggest that the popular view about the virtuous person is wrong. It is for this reason “not unreasonable” that the facts turn out to contradict this view.²⁶ As Aquinas observes: “He states that the facts are not in agreement with the reasons just presented, according to which men are shown to love themselves most. *And this is not in a way unlikely. First because...*”²⁷

To return to the problem of how we are to recognize the alleged facts that contradict the popular view that virtuous people act in disregard of their own good, the context of Aristotle’s claim about the facts may provide us with some guidance. This claim occurs near the end of his extensive two-book investigation of friendship in the NE; and further, the virtuous person’s apparently selfless action is explicitly said to be “for the sake of a friend.” Perhaps, then, the “facts” he has in mind make their appearance in the surrounding investigation of friendship.

Someone might suggest instead that Aristotle’s “facts” are his initial definition of happiness in terms of virtuous activity—or better, since the contrast between the “deeds” or “facts” and the “speeches” implies that the former are observable, whatever observations he relies on to argue for this definition in the well-known “function argument.”²⁸ In other words, if virtue exercises itself in the doing of noble actions, and if the exercise of virtue is essentially identical to happiness, then virtuous people who aim at noble actions are actually aiming at their own

²⁵ See NE 9.81168b5-10.

²⁶ That the above considerations are more “speeches” is observed by Annas (*Morality*, 255, note 31), Lorraine Smith Pangle (*Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 169-70), and C. D. C. Reeve (*Nicomachean Ethics* [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014], 332, note 746), but they do not conclude from this that they are therefore not the facts that Aristotle mentions.

²⁷ *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), paragraph 1858, my emphasis.

²⁸ See NE 1.7.

happiness. But there is a difficulty with this suggestion. The exercise of virtue isn't essentially identical to happiness; happiness is the exercise of virtue in a full life.²⁹ And since some noble actions result in one's death,³⁰ it seems that the goal of performing noble actions and the goal of living a happy life can come apart.³¹ Now, someone might respond that, regardless of whether it always brings you complete happiness, it's always best for you to do what is noble.³² Thus, virtuous people, if they aim at doing what is noble, are aiming at a state of affairs that will be best for themselves. They therefore fail to disregard their own good when they act. We should then understand "the facts" to mean whatever observations support Aristotle's conclusion that it's always in one's best interest to do what is noble.

But there are difficulties with this suggestion as well. As long as Aristotle doesn't take the Stoic position that what is good for oneself is essentially identical to what is noble, the goals of "doing what is noble" and "doing what is best for myself" can be distinguished. It's then possible that virtuous people aim at doing what is noble in such a way that they would still do it even if they thought it was worse for themselves; that is, the fact that doing something noble happens to be best for themselves may be incidental to what virtuous people are trying to accomplish. And this would be enough to make their action selfless.³³ But even if these difficulties can be solved, observe that the popular view that Aristotle is responding to doesn't just say that virtuous people overlook their own good for the sake of doing what is noble; they also overlook it for the sake of the happiness of their friends. And this is a different goal than (oneself) doing noble actions. We would then still need to look for observations that imply that

²⁹ See NE 1.7.1098a18-20.

³⁰ See NE 3.6.1115a28-33.

³¹ See NE 3.9.1117b7-15.

³² Consider NE 9.8.1169a18-29.

³³ Even if this is denied, all that would be needed to generate a clear example of selfless action would be the belief that, in this particular circumstance, acting nobly is not best for oneself.

virtuous people don't selflessly aim at the happiness of their friends, and Aristotle's investigation of friendship in the NE would be the obvious place to start.³⁴

To better understand how Aristotle's investigation of friendship could provide evidence that virtuous people do not act selflessly, we have to understand more about the popular view of virtue that Aristotle is responding to. That view linked the virtuous person's selfless action with "acting for the sake of a friend." Why is that? The answer has to do with popular views about the relation between virtue, noble action, and selflessness. Virtue was popularly thought to aim at, and be productive of, noble action,³⁵ but either some or all noble actions were popularly thought to be selfless.³⁶ However, selfless action is impossible without selfless motivation. And this sort of motivation was thought to be especially available for us in friendship.³⁷ It would thus have been natural to suppose that virtuous people act selflessly towards their friends. Indeed, friendship, by providing one of the greatest motivations for selflessness, would appear to make possible the most selfless acts of virtue. As Seneca puts it: "For what purpose, then, do I make a

³⁴ Not only does Aristotle's statement of, and response to, the endoxic challenge that virtuous people act selflessly, especially in relation to their friends, only occur in the uncontested portion of the NE, but the EE altogether lacks a discussion of *philautia* or "selfishness," which is the subject in connection with which he raises the endoxic challenge. Perhaps the closest thing is EE 6.12.1245b26-1246a1, but even there Aristotle's ultimate stance on the popular view (note *dokei* at 1245b37-8) that one should sacrifice one's own good for the sake of one's friend is unclear. It's also interesting to note that, in the Nicomachean equivalent of the above Eudemian passage (8.7.1159a4-12, discussed in section IV below), Aristotle takes a far more definitive position in denying that we would wish benefits for our friends (like our friends becoming a god) that would make our own lives worse.

³⁵ See NE 1.8.1099a11-15, 8.2.1155b20-24, 9.8.1169a6-13; Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Libri Mantissa*, in *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, Supplementum Aristotellicum, vol. 2, pt. 1, ed. Ivo Bruns (Berlin: Reimar, 1887), 154, lines 30-2. Aristotle's description of the popular attitude towards virtue that I quoted above also agrees on this point.

³⁶ See *Rhetoric* 1.3.1358b38-1359a5, 1.8.1366b36-1367a6, 2.12.1389a32-5, 2.13.1389b35-1390a1; Cope, *The Rhetoric*, vol. 1, 166, note 16; vol. 2, 147, note 12. It is somewhat unclear whether it was popularly thought that (a) some (the greatest?) noble actions were selfless actions or (b) all noble actions were selfless actions. I will here leave this issue open.

³⁷ See NE 8.1.1155a7-9 and 9.9.1169b10-13 with *Rhetoric* 2.4.1380b35-1381a2; Aspasius, *In Ethica Nicomachea Commentaria*, in *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, vol. 19, ed. Gustavus Heylbut (Berlin: Reimer, 1889), 159, lines 12-15; Aquinas, *Commentary*, paragraph 1889; Stern-Gillet, *Friendship*, 39, first paragraph, 114-115, 121; Gabriel Richardson Lear, "Review of *Philosophy of Friendship*, by Lorraine Smith Pangle," *Notre Dame Philosophical Review* (October 12, 2003): first paragraph. For a contemporary example of this view, see Lawrence A. Blum, *Friendship, Altruism, and Morality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 69, bottom paragraph and what follows, 72, 81.

man my friend? In order to have someone for whom I may die, whom I may follow into exile, against whose death I may stake my own life, and pay the pledge, too.”³⁸

There are consequently two ways that Aristotle’s investigation of friendship could provide evidence against the popular view that virtuous people act selflessly. The first way would be to show that virtuous people do not act selflessly towards their friends *tout court*. This would be the strongest form of evidence. But it could also provide the weaker form of evidence that virtuous people do not selflessly benefit their friends *out of friendship*; in other words, it could show that friendship was not the source of selfless motivation it was thought to be. But perhaps there are *other* sources of selfless motivation besides friendship. And perhaps these other sources are available to virtuous people when they act towards their friends. This is why evidence that virtuous people do not act selflessly towards their friends tout court is much stronger. It supports the conclusion that there are not *any* sources of selfless motivation available to virtuous people when they act towards their friends.

In the remainder of this paper, I will argue that Aristotle attempts to provide both of the above kinds of evidence in his Nicomachean investigation of friendship.³⁹ Sections three and four will each identify an observation that suggests that friendship is not a source of selfless motivation. The first observation comes to light in connection with his treatment of the definition of friendship; the second observation comes to light in connection with his perplexity about whether we would wish for our friends to become gods. Section five will then identify an observation that suggests that friends do not selflessly benefit each other tout court. This

³⁸ “Epistle IX,” trans. R. M. Gummere, in *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship*, ed. Michael Pakaluk (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), 121.

³⁹ As I mentioned above (see note 34), the NE is the more obvious place to look for this sort of evidence. I will therefore leave it to another occasion to consider whether Aristotle’s Eudemian investigation of friendship *also* provides evidence that virtuous people don’t act selflessly toward their friends, though I have already noted one place where the NE takes a clearer stance on the issue (see the above-mentioned note). I still will on occasion refer the Eudemian discussion of friendship when I feel that it helps elucidate the Nicomachean one.

observation comes to light in connection with the requirement that friends preserve equality between themselves.

III

Aristotle holds in the NE that “friendship” (*philia*) has several senses.⁴⁰ It can, for example, denote a relationship between two people that exists merely because the two “friends” (*philoī*) are instrumental in realizing certain ends that are entirely separable from each other⁴¹—the “friendship” that might exist between a mob boss and a hit man, to name one example. Nevertheless, he also holds that, among the many relationships called “friendship,” one is friendship in an “authoritative” sense (*kuriōs*); that is, there is such a thing as friendship in the “proper” sense of the term that the instrumentally motivated relationship described above falls short of.⁴² In what follows, I will use “friend” or “friendship” to refer to friends or friendship in this authoritative sense.

Aristotle offers two different accounts of what friendship amounts to. The first account defines it as mutually recognized goodwill⁴³ where “goodwill” (*eunoia*) is “wishing good things [for someone] for that person’s sake.”⁴⁴ By contrast, the second account points to “sharing life together” (*suzēn*) as the most characteristic element of friendship.⁴⁵ Given that the second

⁴⁰ I follow David Konstan’s observation that *philos* often has the restricted sense of “friend” as opposed to the wider sense of “loved one” (*Friendship in the Classical World* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 67-70). I also take *philia*, when it occurs in the context of *philos* in this restricted sense, to mean “friendship.”

⁴¹ See NE 8.4.1157a14-16.

⁴² See NE 8.4.1157a25-32.

⁴³ See NE 8.2.1155b33-1156a3.

⁴⁴ NE 8.2.1155b31.

⁴⁵ See NE 8.6.1158a5-10, 8.5.1157b17-19; compare *Politics* 3.9.1280b38-9. Someone could argue that Aristotle in fact offers three accounts of friendship in the NE—the third being the friend as an *allos autos* (“other oneself”). But I don’t think this is correct. Even after Aristotle introduces the “other oneself,” he continues to speak of sharing life together as the fundamental aim of friendship (see NE 9.10, 12). I therefore take it that the friend being “another oneself” is one of the non-definitional facts about friendship that the correct definition of friendship should be able to explain (compare *Posterior Analytics* 2.3). As to what Aristotle means by “other oneself,” I cannot fully discuss the issue in this paper, but I favor what I call a “similarity” reading; that is, I don’t think that he means that my friend’s “self” is literally identical to my own

account occurs after the first, it is plausible that Aristotle intends it as a correction of the first.⁴⁶ Why, then, does he make what Michael Pakaluk describes as this “surprising” change?⁴⁷ The answer to this question will lead us to the first observation that suggests that friendship is not a source of selfless motivation.

Immediately prior to giving his second account of friendship, which identifies living life together, and not mutually recognized goodwill, as the most characteristic element of friendship, Aristotle makes the following observation:

[Distant] locations do not dissolve friendship without qualification, but the activity. But if the absence becomes lengthy, then it also seems to make the friendship forgotten, from which it has been said “many friendships a lack of contact dissolves.”⁴⁸

In order to understand the import of this observation, we must follow Aristotle in making a distinction. We must entertain that there is both the condition of “being friends” and a “stable disposition” (*hexis*) that friendship involves—a way that friends, as friends, are stably disposed towards each other. Perhaps the condition of “being friends” simply is two people possessing this stable disposition towards each other; perhaps it is two people possessing this stable disposition plus some other element—like the “mutual recognition” in the first account. The essential point is that the condition of “being friends” involves being stably disposed towards one another “as friends.”

(see Elijah Millgram, “Aristotle on Making Other Selves,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 17 [1987]); Stern-Gillet, *Friendship*, chapters 1-2 and 140, bottom); rather, I think that he means that we are disposed towards our friends in certain ways that are similar to the ways that we are disposed toward ourselves (see Michael Pakaluk, *Nicomachean Ethics, Books VIII and IX* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999], comment on 1166a29-33; consider NE 9.4.1166a30, 9.9.1170b5, 9.12.1171b33-5). Those who are interested in further discussion of this issue should see the appendix of Guy Schuh, *Aristotle on the Impossibility of Altruism*, PhD diss. (Boston University, 2017).

⁴⁶ This is the view of Sarah Broadie (*Nicomachean Ethics* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], comment on VIII 2, 1155b17-1156a5) and Pangle (*Friendship*, 54, bottom paragraph). Regardless of whether they see this second account as an explicit correct of the first, Aquinas (*Commentary*, paragraph 1599-1600) and Gauthier and Jolif (*L'Éthique*, comment on 1155b27-1156a3 with their comment on 1166a1-10) take it to express Aristotle's considered view.

⁴⁷ *Books VIII and IX*, 84.

⁴⁸ NE 8.5.1157b10-13.

It is this stable disposition—and not the condition of being friends—that Aristotle refers to in the above passage by the name “friendship” (*philia*).⁴⁹ He therefore observes that prolonged distance, which in the Ancient world implied the prolonged absence of mutual interaction or contact, dissolves this stable disposition; that is, given enough time, prolonged distance weakens and eventually destroys—“makes forgotten”—the stable disposition that friendship involves. This observation supports his second account of friendship over his first. To see why, we will have to fill in some more of the details of his first account.

In his first account, Aristotle stipulates mutually recognized goodwill as the definition of friendship. Put in terms of the distinction introduced above, he identifies goodwill as the stable disposition that friendship involves and the existence of this disposition in two people, along with the mutual recognition of this fact, as the condition of being friends. However, he also holds that friends have goodwill for each other on account of each other’s virtue.⁵⁰ But prolonged distance does not destroy the friends’ virtue. Thus, if the stable disposition that friendship involves were goodwill, then prolonged distance should not dissolve it. It should only dissolve when one or both of the friends ceases to be virtuous—hence Aristotle’s initial claim that “the friendship of these [virtuous] people lasts as long as they are virtuous.”⁵¹ But this is not what he later observes.⁵² His observation that prolonged distance dissolves friendship thus suggests that

⁴⁹ See NE 8.5.1157b5-7, 28-32; EE 6.2.1237a33-4.

⁵⁰ See NE 8.3.1156b7-10, 8.13.1162b7.

⁵¹ NE 8.3.1156b11-12.

⁵² Aspasius, on the other hand, claims that Aristotle’s observation about distance does not extend to virtuous friends, whose friendship “is not like this; rather, it is solid and lasting, and nothing is stronger than it, neither time nor division of place.” (*Commentaria*, 171, lines 6-8). But this reading doesn’t fit well with the context. Moreover, Aristotle endorses a similar proverb about friendship and distance in the EE (see 6.12.1245a22-4). As may already be clear from the above quotation, Aspasius is more idealistic than Aristotle, which leads him to blunt the edges of some of Aristotle’s more pessimistic observations (see, also, Aspasius’ comment on NE 8.7.1159a8-12 [*Commentaria*, 179, lines 16-18]). For the point that the observation that prolonged distance dissolves friendship was seen as pessimistic, see Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 3 vols., ed. G. Kaibel (Leipzig: Teubner, 1887—1890), 5.3.17-23 and note “the most misanthropic of proverbs” (*tēi misanthrōpotatēi tōn paroimōn*).

the stable disposition that friendship involves is not identical to goodwill.⁵³

So far, we have seen how Aristotle's observation counts against his first account of friendship. But how does it count in favor of his second account? To answer that question, we have to observe that, in his second account, friends are stably disposed toward one another in two ways; they are disposed (i) to benefit each other and (ii) to share life together.⁵⁴ Thus, in contradistinction to his first account, which implied that the disposition to benefit one's friend (for their own sake) was *the* stable disposition that friendship involves, he later (and reasonably) casts the stable disposition that friendship involves as a "complex" disposition with two different parts—the disposition to share life together and the disposition to benefit one's friend. However, these parts are not equal. The fact that Aristotle endorses "sharing life together" as most characteristic of friendship indicates that he sees the disposition to do this as the primary part of the complex disposition; that is, sharing life together is most characteristic of friendship insofar as it is the object of the primary part of the complex disposition that friendship involves; it is what friends, as friends, are primarily disposed to do. And it is specifically this point—that the disposition to share life together is the primary part of the complex disposition that friendship involves—that is supported by his observation that prolonged distance dissolves this complex disposition; that is, it dissolves *both* the disposition to share life together with one's friend *and* the disposition to benefit him.⁵⁵

It is easy enough to explain why prolonged distance dissolves the stable disposition to share life with one's friend. According to Aristotle, sharing life with a friend is a great good,⁵⁶

⁵³ Alternatively, Aristotle could have abandoned his claim that we have goodwill towards others in response to their virtue, but this isn't what he does; see NE 9.5.

⁵⁴ See NE 8.5.1157b5-10; Aquinas, *Commentary*, paragraph 1596.

⁵⁵ Otherwise, the friendship wouldn't really be "forgotten." This is also Aquinas' view (*Commentary*, paragraph 1597).

⁵⁶ See NE 1.8.1099b3-6, 8.1.1155a5-6, 8.5.1157b19-22, 9.9.1169b8-10, 16-20; EE 6.1.1234b31-3.

and it is because it is such a great good that friends are stably disposed to seek it out.⁵⁷ But the realization of this good clearly requires the presence of the friend—or at the very least some form of interaction or contact. The prolonged absence of the friend, which in the Ancient world implied the absence of mutual interaction or contact, therefore destroys the possibility of achieving the good that grounds this disposition. This presumably leads to the erosion of the disposition for at least two reasons; (i) the more we accept that sharing life with our friend is not achievable, the less inclined we become to seek it out⁵⁸ and (ii) as we come to rely more on others for achieving a shared life with friends, we become more disposed to seek this good with those others instead.

It is more difficult, however, to explain why prolonged distance also dissolves the disposition to benefit one's friend. After all, if friends are disposed to benefit each other because of the other friend's virtue—as they were in his first account—then prolonged distance should not dissolve this disposition.⁵⁹ But if Aristotle makes the disposition to benefit one's friend depend upon the disposition to share life with him, he can well explain his observation. If I am disposed to share life with my friend, then I am, by virtue of that fact, also disposed to provide him with good things. This is because some good things are instrumental to my friend sharing life with me⁶⁰ but also because enjoying good things together—flourishing together—is the very

⁵⁷ See NE 9.12.1172a1-8.

⁵⁸ For the principle that the dissolution of the grounds of a friendship leads to the dissolution of the friendship, see NE 8.3.1156a22-4, 9.1.1164a8-10, 9.3.1165a36-b4.

⁵⁹ Aquinas (*Commentary*, paragraph 1597) offers the explanation that all dispositions must be exercised to be preserved, but Aristotle doesn't seem to share this principle. We saw that in his initial account, he grounds friendship in the virtuous character of the friends and declares that (therefore) the friendship will last as long as the friends' virtue. Besides, Aquinas' principle admits of counter-examples. Imagine that a son goes missing, for whatever reason, for twenty years, until he is finally found again by his (loving) mother. Clearly, it's possible for her to maintain her disposition to benefit and care for her son.

⁶⁰ See Pakaluk, *Books VIII and IX*, 84, bottom paragraph.

best form of sharing life together with my friend.⁶¹ Being disposed to share life together thus brings with it a certain disposition to benefit one's friend. And if the disposition to benefit one's friend that friendship involves just is this same disposition—in other words, if I don't simply want my friend to be happy, but want him to be happy *as a meaningful part of a shared life with myself*—then Aristotle can well explain his observation that distance dissolves the disposition that friendship involves.⁶² Since I am disposed to benefit my friend by virtue of the fact that I am disposed to share life together with him, whatever dissolves this disposition—such as prolonged distance—necessarily dissolves the other one. However, it is a consequence of this explanation that the disposition to share life together becomes the more fundamental one, since it explains the disposition to benefit our friend. And this is how Aristotle's observation counts in favor of his second account of friendship.

I have so far argued that Aristotle's observation that prolonged distance dissolves friendship supports adopting his second account of friendship in place of his first. However, I have also claimed that this observation supports the further conclusion that friends are not, as friends, selflessly disposed to benefit each other. I will now present this part of my interpretation. I argued above that, in his second account, Aristotle views the disposition to share life together as the primary part of the complex disposition that friendship involves because it explains the other part—namely, the disposition to benefit one's friend; that is, friends are disposed to benefit their friends insofar as this contributes to sharing (in the ideal case, a flourishing) life together. This

⁶¹ That is, as opposed to sharing misfortune together; see EE 6.12.1245a18-22, 6.12.1246a1-10 with NE 9.12.1172a1-8.

⁶² He can also explain his related observation that enjoying spending time together is what makes people become friends in the first place (see NE 8.6.1158a1-6; Heliodorus, *In Ethica Nicomachea Paraphrasis*, in *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, vol. 19, ed. Gustavus Heylbut [Berlin: Reimer, 1889], 170, lines 28-9; Aquinas, *Commentary*, paragraphs 1598, 1607-8); that is, he can explain why enjoying another's presence makes us disposed to benefit him (as a friend).

disposition consequently falls short of goodwill.⁶³ Goodwill implies that the end that I am wishing for just is the happiness of my friend. But we have seen that, on Aristotle's analysis, this is not the case. What friends really wish for is a life of *shared* happiness, which is not quite the same thing as the other friend's happiness. As will be the focus of the next section, there are benefits that could bring my friend a happy life but destroy the possibility of him sharing that life with me. But if the disposition to benefit one's friend that friendship involves falls short of goodwill, then it definitely falls short of selfless love, which requires that we selflessly wish for our friend's happiness as an end—that is, that we possess selfless goodwill.⁶⁴

On the other hand, if one employs a less demanding standard for goodwill, it's still possible to accommodate it in Aristotle's second account of friendship. One could argue that, insofar as my friend's happiness is a constitutive part of him sharing a happy life with me, the disposition to benefit one another that friendship involves still counts as goodwill; it's just that this particular goodwill is essentially "colored" by the friends' desire to share life together, which is something they pursue as a prominent good. As such, the particular goodwill that friends bear for each other would still fall short of a selfless desire for each other's happiness. But there is textual support that Aristotle adopts the more demanding standard for goodwill. In NE 9.5 he

⁶³ On the point that wanting to share life together with one's friend falls short of goodwill, see Pangle, *Friendship*, 40, bottom paragraph. H. H. Joachim (*The Nicomachean Ethics: A Commentary*, ed. D. A. Rees [Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1970], 249) makes a similar point about wanting to enjoy our friend's presence.

⁶⁴ Compare the (popular) definition of friendship in terms of selfless love at *Rhetoric* 2.4.1380b35-1381a2. I don't intend to suggest that the only way that Aristotle could argue for the conclusion that friends don't possess selfless goodwill is by subordinating their concern for each other's happiness to their concern to share life together. After all, one could argue directly that our friend's happiness is a constituent part of our own happiness and is pursued as such (see note 1). I am claiming, rather, that this subordination is how the phenomena struck him. Besides, asserting that our friends' happiness is a constituent part of our own wouldn't be enough to settle the matter. We'd still need some sort of argument—or, according to Aristotle's statement in NE 9.8, observable "fact"—that friends aren't selflessly disposed to their friends happiness above and beyond whatever contribution their happiness might make to their own.

says that goodwill, even if it is mutually recognized, is the “starting point” (*archē*)⁶⁵ of friendship, but not friendship proper:

People would not be able to be friends if they did not have goodwill, but those who have goodwill do not for all that love, for they only wish good things for those for whom they have goodwill, but they would not assist them at all, and neither would they be troubled on account of them. On account of this, someone could say metaphorically that goodwill is “lazy friendship,” but existing for a time and reaching the point of habitually spending time together (*sunētheia*), it becomes friendship.⁶⁶

Though this passage confirms that mutually recognized goodwill is not the definition of friendship,⁶⁷ it upholds the presence of goodwill among friends. This may seem to indicate that Aristotle thinks the disposition to benefit one another that friendship involves meets the standard of goodwill. However, this goodwill is a sort of vestigial wish that is of such weakness that is incapable of motivating us to act.⁶⁸ It is for this reason distinct from the disposition to benefit one’s friend that friendship involves since that disposition actually does motivate us to act.⁶⁹ Rather than contradicting the claim that the disposition to benefit one another that friendship involves falls short of goodwill, 9.5 appears to confirm it.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ *Archē* here means the beginning point from which something develops and not, like before, “explanatory starting point”; that is, mutual goodwill is the condition from which friendship develops—if it does develop—but this condition does not explain why people are or become friends (see NE 9.5.1167a3-8).

⁶⁶ NE 9.5.1167a7-12. Note that it is habitually spending time together that makes two people become friends and, by that fact, actually disposed to benefit one another. This is exactly what we would expect if the fundamental goal of friendship is sharing life together. See note 62.

⁶⁷ Gauthier and Jolif see that Aristotle in this chapter rejects mutually recognized goodwill as the definition of friendship (*L'Éthique*, comment on 1166b30), which they consider an Academic definition (see their same comment; they are referring to the first two “marks of friendship” at NE 9.4.1166a2-6), though they claim at the same time that Aristotle upholds his earlier definition from 8.2 (comment on 1167a10-21). However, this is only because they read his earlier definition as obliquely referring to “living life together” or “l’intimité” (comment on 1155b27-1156a3). That 9.5 rejects mutually recognized goodwill as the definition of friendship is also observed by Pakaluk (*Books VIII and IX*, comment on 1166b32-4), though he later changes his view (see note 70).

⁶⁸ See NE 9.5.1167a2-3; Aquinas, *Commentary*, paragraph 1823.

⁶⁹ In this regard it is interesting to note that goodwill is explicitly distinguished from the wish to benefit another in the *Magna Moralia* (2.12.8).

⁷⁰ Pakaluk argues in his later work that Aristotle is here using “goodwill” in a different sense than before—as equivalent to a general wish that someone do well as opposed to (before) the special affection that friends bear for each other (*Introduction*, 261-4). This distinction allows him to read Aristotle’s claims about goodwill in 9.5 as having no implications for (a) the definition of friendship or (b) the character of the disposition to

IV

A second observation that speaks against the popular view that friendship is a source of selfless motivation appears in Aristotle's investigation of friendships between unequals—that is, friendships where one of the friends exceeds the other in some important respect, such as virtue, wisdom, or the ability to provide benefits.⁷¹ He there raises the following perplexity (*aporia*):

Perhaps friends do not wish the greatest of goods for their friends, for example, to be gods, for they will no longer be friends to them, and they will not be good things, for friends are good things.⁷²

Gods are understood by Aristotle to be perfectly blessed or “self-sufficient” beings⁷³—that is, beings who need absolutely nothing else in addition to what they already possess. To become a god is therefore the greatest benefit that one could wish for one's friend. It is to leave behind all neediness and deficiency forever. But, according to Aristotle, a human being cannot be friends with a god since they exceed us to the greatest possible degree in all important respects.⁷⁴ The benefit to our friend of becoming a god would therefore bring about the destruction of our friendship, which, since having a friend is a good thing, would deprive us of a good. Aristotle's perplexity is therefore the perplexity of whether a friend would wish a good for his friend that would destroy the good he finds in his friendship—or, to put it even more generally, whether a friend would wish a good for his friend that would result in himself being harmed or deprived.⁷⁵

benefit one's friend that friendship involves (see the same pages as above). However, that Aristotle is using goodwill in a different sense than before is far from clear. I have, at any rate, offered a way to understand his statements about goodwill in 9.5 that does not require resorting to the hypothesis that he is there using the word in a different sense.

⁷¹ See NE 8.7.1158b33-5 and the whole chapter more generally.

⁷² NE 8.7.1159a6-8.

⁷³ See NE 9.4.1166a21-2, 10.8.1178b8-9; EE 6.12.1245b14-19; compare Plato, *Symposium* 202c6-9; *Definitions* 411a3; Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 1.44-5.

⁷⁴ See NE 8.7.1158b33-6.

⁷⁵ This is also how Geoffrey Percival (*Aristotle on Friendship* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940], 43) and Pakaluk (*Books VIII and IX*, comment on 1159a5-12) understand the perplexity. There is a contrary reading that casts it as a difficulty about whether we would wish a good for our friend that would deprive him of the good of (our) friendship; see Burnet, *The Ethics*, 377, note 6; Gauthier and Jolif, *L'Éthique*, comment on

Aristotle provides his solution to the general perplexity of whether a friend would wish for his friend to have a good that would result in himself being harmed or deprived through his solution to the particular perplexity of whether a friend would wish for his friend to become a god.⁷⁶ His solution to the particular perplexity is as follows:

If it has been well said that a friend wishes good things for his friend for his sake, he must remain the sort of being he is; the friend will wish the greatest goods for his friend as a human being. But perhaps not all good things, for each person most of all wishes good things for himself.⁷⁷

Aristotle denies that we would wish that our friend become a god, even though this is the greatest imaginable good he could enjoy. If we do wish good things for our friend, he must remain a human being—that is, he must remain a friend, and therefore a good thing, to us. His solution to this particular perplexity therefore implies that when friends believe that their friends' possession of a good will harm or deprive themselves, they will not wish for their friend to possess this good. He thus solves the general perplexity of whether we would wish a good for our friend that would result in ourselves being harmed or deprived by answering that we would not.⁷⁸

Aristotle's solution to the particular perplexity of whether we would wish our friends to become gods is sometimes misunderstood. Some commentators⁷⁹ understand his solution to be that our wish for our friend's good is essentially a wish for him to have good things as a human being; that is, we do not wish our friend to have "divine" goods because the "content" of our

1159a7-8; Irwin's translation of this passage in *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999) and 280, note to paragraph §6. However, since gods are perfectly blessed beings (see note 73), this reading is implausible; on this point, see John Cooper, "Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship," in *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 326, note 19; Pakaluk, *Books VIII and IX*, 97, bottom paragraph.

⁷⁶ Contrast Percival (*Friendship*, 43), who depicts Aristotle as avoiding the general perplexity. He misses that the answer to the particular perplexity already implies an answer to the general one. Because the same considerations motivate both, to solve one is to solve the other, though he perhaps ends up acknowledging this point; see 44.

⁷⁷ NE 8.71159a8-12.

⁷⁸ This is also the view of Percival (*Friendship*, 44).

⁷⁹ For example, Cooper, "Forms," 326, first paragraph; Pakaluk, *Books VIII and IX*, 98, first paragraph.

wish always was “x having human goods.” Thus, on their interpretation, our not wishing for our friend to become a god is not explained by the dominance of our concern for our own good. It is simply an independent psychological fact that the only wish for our friend’s good that we are capable of forming has as its content “enjoying human goods,” and this would still be true even if we cared nothing for our own good.

The difficulty with this interpretation is that it disconnects Aristotle’s response to the god example from the initial terms of the perplexity. The challenge he is considering is that we will not wish great goods for our friends—“for example” (*hoin*), becoming gods—that will dissolve our friendship and therefore deprive us of a good thing.⁸⁰ This interpretation then understands his response to be as follows: “well, either way, it’s not possible for us to wish our friend to become a god since our wish for our friend’s good is essentially a wish for him to enjoy human goods.” But this would be to avoid the general perplexity by quibbling with the proposed example. Furthermore, this interpretation makes Aristotle’s concluding claim that we “perhaps” do not wish all goods for our friends because we love our own good most of all unrelated to his response to the god example. The interpretation I have offered is therefore preferable. We do not wish our friends to have “divine” goods because we do not want ourselves to be deprived of the good of their friendship. This (i) provides a general solution to the general perplexity that applies to all examples, of which the god example is merely one, and (ii) explains his concluding remark that we wish most of all for our own good.⁸¹

Perhaps someone will grant these general points but challenge my interpretation in the following way. Aristotle does allow that we will wish good things for our friends when this

⁸⁰ That one’s friend becoming a god is merely one example of the general perplexity is well-observed by Aquinas (*Commentary*, paragraph 1636), who offers as additional examples of one’s friend becoming a king or much more virtuous than oneself.

⁸¹ On this point, see Charles Kahn, “Aristotle and Altruism,” *Mind* 90 (1981): 21, note 2.

would harm or deprive ourselves. It's just that—since “each person most of all wishes good things for himself”—the good that our friend will receive must proportionately outweigh the loss that we ourselves will suffer.⁸² But observe that our friend becoming a god is one of these situations. The benefit that our friend would receive can even be said to infinitely outweigh the (finite) loss that we would sustain since our friend would gain the *eternal* possession of perfect happiness. And Aristotle denies that in this situation we would wish that our friend possess this good. He therefore denies that, when the benefit that our friend would receive proportionately outweighs the loss that we would suffer, we would wish him to have that benefit.

I have argued that Aristotle solves the general perplexity of whether we would wish goods for our friends when their possession of these goods would harm or deprive ourselves by denying that we would wish such goods for our friends. Whether this implies that friendship isn't selfless depends on how friends who selflessly wish good things for their friends—only not as much as they wish them for themselves—would form wishes when there is a conflict between their good and their friend's. Such friends could either (i) always give preference to themselves or (ii) wish a benefit for their friend whenever it would proportionately outweigh the loss that they themselves would suffer. If we go with (i), Aristotle's conclusion would not rule out that friendship is selfless. It would just restrict the expression of this selflessness to cases where there is no conflict with the first friend's good. If we go with (ii), then, as we saw, Aristotle's conclusion would rule out that friends selflessly love their friends.

This ambiguity makes it difficult to conclusively assess the evidentiary status of Aristotle's observation that we do not wish for our friends to become gods. On option (ii) above, his observation would be freestanding evidence that friendship is not a source of selfless motivation. On option (i), his observation would best be classified as supplementary evidence for

⁸² Pangle takes this to be Aristotle's view; see *Friendship*, 181-2.

his second account of friendship. As we saw, that account implied that friends want their friends to be happy insofar as it is a meaningful part of a shared life. It is a consequence of this that when the happiness of my friend destroys the possibility of our sharing life together, I will not want it, at least, not *out of friendship*. Our friend becoming a god is an excellent example of such a circumstance, and, according to Aristotle's second observation, this is not something that we actually want for our friends. Thus, on both options, his observation will count as evidence that friendship is not a source of selfless motivation. It is just unclear whether it counts as a freestanding piece of evidence for this conclusion or merely supplementary evidence to his second account of friendship.

V

So far, I have discussed two observations that speak against the view that friendship is a source of selfless motivation. This evidence helps remove a prominent source of selfless motivation that virtuous people were thought to draw on. I also noted, however, that there was a stronger sort of evidence that Aristotle could offer: observations that virtuous friends do not selflessly benefit each other tout court. In this section, I will discuss one such observation—namely, that equality is necessary for preserving friendship.⁸³ Now, by “equality” (*isotēs*, *to ison*) Aristotle does not mean “similarity” between friends—for example, that two friends are “equally” virtuous—but rather the “equal” exchange of benefit within a friendship.⁸⁴ This is strongly supported by the

⁸³ See NE 8.8.1159a33-b2, 8.13.1162a34-b4, 8.14.1163b11-12, 9.1.1163b32-3.

⁸⁴ This is not to deny that Aristotle ever uses words designating “equality” in the sense of “similarity.” This sense appears when “equal” (*isos*) or “unequal” (*anisos*) qualify the *people* in a friendship—that is, friendships between equals or unequals (see, for example, NE 8.8.1159b1-2, 8.11.1161a25-6). My claim, rather, is that, in the context of friendship, the abstract noun, *isotēs*, and the related phrases and verbs I mentioned above refer to equal exchange and not equality in the sense of similarity. That “equality” refers to the equal exchange of benefit is also the view of Aspasius (*Commentaria*, 173, lines 1-2), Percival (*Friendship*, 30, bottom paragraph, 41-42), Gautier and Jolif (*L'Éthique*, comment on 1157b36), and Pakaluk (*Books VIII and IX*, 133, bottom paragraph, comments on 1157b35-1158a1, 1158b19, 1158b29-33). Aquinas glosses Aristotle's reference to the proverb that “friendship is equality” (*philotēs isotēs*) at NE 8.5.1157b36 as referring to equal love between friends (*Commentary*, paragraph 1605). This may give the impression that he understands “equality” only to

details of his discussion: (i) he claims that “equality and similarity is friendship (*hē isotēs kai homoiotēs philotēs*), especially the similarity of those who are similar with respect to virtue” (1159b2-4); that is, since “equality” (*isotēs*) already refers to equal reciprocation, he must add “similarity” (*homoiotēs*) to pick out to the additional characteristic of similarity between friends; (ii) he introduces the proverb “friendship is equality” (*philotēs isotēs*) in the context of his claim that virtuous friends “pay back what is equal (*to ison antapodidōsi*) in wish [that is, of good things for the other friend] and in pleasure,” [alternatively, “in form”], “for,” he goes on to explain, “it is said that ‘friendship is equality;’”⁸⁵ (iii) like the context of his use of the noun *isotēs* (“equality”), the context of his use of the related phrase *to ison* (“what is equal”)—for instance, in the previous quotation—and of the related verbs *isazō*, *epanisoō* (“equalize”) clearly suggests equal, or at least proportional, exchange.⁸⁶ In sum, for Aristotle to observe that “equality” is necessary for preserving friendship is for him to observe that an equal exchange of benefit is necessary for preserving it.

Some may be tempted to argue that Aristotle relegates the need for preserving an equal exchange of benefits to lesser forms of friendship. The authoritative form of friendship, on the other hand, especially if it exists between two virtuous people, is characterized by spontaneous and unconditional giving.⁸⁷ There is therefore no need for virtuous friends to balance accounts in order to hold their relationship together. We have already seen some reason to call this picture

refer to equal love between friends and not the general equalizing of benefits or pleasure, but he later observes: “If then friends would be equal in any kind of friendship, they must be equated both in respect to loving—so that each loves the other equally; and in respect to the other requirements such as the courtesies of friends” (*Commentary*, paragraph 1727). Stern-Gillet (*Friendship*, 39-41) and Lear (“Review,” paragraphs 18-19), on the other hand, read “equality” in terms of “similarity” between friends.

⁸⁵ NE 8.5.1157b35-6.

⁸⁶ See NE 8.7.1158b23-33, 8.8.1159a33-1159b4, 8.13.1162a35-b4, 8.13.1163a16-19, 8.14.1163b10-12, 9.1.1163b32-5.

⁸⁷ For example, Konstan, *Friendship*, 78-82, though he reports to me that he has since changed his view. He is here relying on Aristotle’s contrast between gifts given on the condition of a return and those given “to a friend” (NE 8.13.1162b31-1163a6). I discuss this contrast below.

into question. Aristotle demotes goodwill in friendship and makes the wish to share life together its central feature; this wish, however, does not give rise to spontaneous and unconditional giving, but to giving that contains the implicit condition that our friend's happiness will be a meaningful part of a shared life with ourselves. Thus, when our friends' happiness would diverge from that condition, as it does in the case of them becoming gods, Aristotle claims we do not wish such benefits for our friend, at least, not out of friendship.

Furthermore, there is strong evidence that Aristotle extends the requirement of an equal return of benefits to the friendships of virtuous people:⁸⁸ (i) as we saw above, he says that virtuous friends deliberately “pay back what is equal” (*to ison antapodidōsi*) in wishing good things for each other;⁸⁹ (ii) he compares friendship to justice (or “fairness”) on account of their relation to different sorts of distributive equality;⁹⁰ (iii) he says that “loving according to merit” preserves both equal and unequal friendships;⁹¹ (iv) he states that equal friends, among which he

⁸⁸ That he does so is also the view of Aspasius (see *Commentaria*, 185, lines 8-10) and Aquinas (see *Commentary*, paragraphs 1727, 1742-3, 1758). It also seems to be the view of Michael of Ephesus (see *In Ethica Nicomachea Commentaria*, in *Commentaria In Aristotelem Graeca*, vol. 20, ed. Gustavus Heylbut [Berlin: Reimar, 1892], 461, lines 3-8), Gautier and Jolif (*L'Éthique*, vol. 2, 690-1), Irwin (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 287), Pangle (*Friendship*, 81, bottom paragraph, note “including the best and most equal,” 126, bottom paragraph with 130, first paragraph, though perhaps she ultimately think there are exceptions, see 181), and Alexander Nehamas (“Aristotelian Philia, Modern Friendship,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 39 [2010]: 229, bottom paragraph). Pakaluk is difficult to pin down on this point. I discuss his view below.

⁸⁹ The verb *antapodidōmi* marks the intention of a deliberate return. It is not simply that, out of equal love, virtuous friends spontaneously wish benefits for one another. Rather, their wishing benefits for one another takes on the form of a deliberate repayment. This implication is observed by Pakaluk (*Books VIII and IX*, comment on 1157b35-1158a1, note “equal, reciprocal exchanges”).

⁹⁰ See NE 8.7.1158b29-33. The comparison is that friendship primarily involves “equality according to quantity” and secondarily “equality according to proportion;” justice—that is, “particular justice” or “fairness”—primarily involves “equality according to proportion” and secondarily “equality according to quantity.” But this comparison would be weak if virtuous friends weren't characterized by distributive equality. For further discussion of the comparison see Alexander Grant, *The Ethics of Aristotle*, 4th ed., vol. 2 (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 250, division II, 264, note 3; Pakaluk, *Books VIII and IX*, 87, bottom paragraph, 94, bottom paragraph, 134, bottom paragraph).

⁹¹ The full passage is “among those who this [understand: “loving”] comes to be according to merit (*kat' axian*) these are lasting friends and so is their friendship. And in this way also (*kai*) those who are unequal may especially be friends, for they would be equalized” (NE 8.8.1159a33-b2). The fact that Aristotle extends the point that loving according to merit preserves friendship to unequal friends with the use of the adverb *kai* shows that he intends the point to apply to *both* equal *and* unequal friendships. On the face of it, loving each other may not look like an exchange of goods, but, according to Aristotle, “being loved” is itself a good (see NE

explicitly lists friends of equal virtue, “should” or “must” (*dei*) make both their love equal “and also the remaining things”—that is, favors or benefits;⁹² (v) he specifically addresses how virtuous friends should measure the “repayment” (*amoibē, antapodosis*) that they should make to each other.⁹³

On the other hand, there is one place where Aristotle seems to suggest that sufficiently equal benefit can be achieved between two virtuous friends merely by one friend performing a noble benefaction. The idea is that the other friend gets a benefaction while the one who acts gets the personal benefit of a noble action as well as the satisfaction of knowing that he is superior in virtue to his virtuous friend:

For, on the one hand, those who are friends because of virtue eagerly benefit each other (for this belongs both to virtue and to friendship), and there are neither fights nor accusations among those who *compete* (*hamillōmenōn*) with regard to this, for nobody is displeased with one who loves and benefits, but, if he is refined, he *retaliates* (*amunetai*) by doing something good. And the one who surpasses, obtaining that at which he aims, would not accuse his friend, for each longs for the good.⁹⁴

This passage may appear to absolve virtuous friends of the need to pay back each other’s benefactions, but it’s describing a special case. The two virtuous friends are competing with each other in order to prove that they are superior in virtue. Aristotle’s use of *hamillaomai* (“contend”) and *amunomai* (“retaliate”) suggests this.⁹⁵ Furthermore, this is exactly the sort of

8.8.1159a25-7). To love a friend is therefore to provide him with a good. Indeed, this is presupposed by his claim that inferiors can offer proportionately greater love to a superior in order to approximate equality in their friendship. After all, one couldn’t equalize a friendship by failing to provide one’s friend with something good. For more on love as an exchangeable good, see Pakaluk, *Books VIII and IX*, 94.

⁹² See NE 8.13.1162a34-b3. That “the remaining things” includes benefits or favors is also the reading of Aquinas (*Commentary*, paragraph 1727), J. A. Stewart (*Notes on the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle* [New York: Arno Press, 1973], comment on 1162b3), and Burnet (*The Ethics*, comment on this passage).

⁹³ See NE 8.13.1163a9-20, 8.13.1163a21-23, 9.1.1164a34-1164b2.

⁹⁴ NE 8.13.1162b6-13, my emphasis.

⁹⁵ This is also the reading of Pakaluk (*Books VIII and IX*, comment on 1162b5-21) and Pangle (*Friendship*, 124, top paragraph). Stewart also understands the friends to be competing with each other in this way (*Notes*, comment on 1162b11, note “competition”), though he misses the point that the friend who excels is satisfied by the proof of his superior virtue. Gauthier and Jolif also appear to understand the passage this way; see *L’Éthique*, comment on 1162b12-13 and note “si elle doit justifier les mots “ce qu’il désirait,” elle est bien

competitiveness that he attributes to the great-souled man, who “is the sort to do a benefit, but is ashamed to be done a benefit, for the one belongs to the one who exceeds, the other to the one who is exceeded, and he is likely to benefit more in return, for, in this way, the one who initiated will have been done a good turn and will be in debt to him in addition.”⁹⁶ The above-described virtuous friends are thus using each other as a measure of virtue that each is hoping to surpass.⁹⁷ The one who turns out to be superior is then satisfied by the resulting proof of his outstanding virtue and does not in this circumstance require a return benefit. But, as we have seen, Aristotle is clear that when virtuous friends are not competing with each other in order to prove that they are outstandingly virtuous, they must pay back each other’s benefactions.

Now, it seems clear that the requirement of an equal return of benefits to maintain a friendship is an observation that suggests that friendship is not a source of selfless motivation. As David Ross puts it, “Traces of an egoistic view are present even in the account of friendship, as they should be, for friendship is not mere benevolence *but demands a return*.”⁹⁸ But this observation also suggests that virtuous friends do not benefit each other selflessly tout court. If

négligemment rédigée; on devrait avoir “car l’un et l’autre aspirant à faire *plus* de bien,” (“If this remark [“for each longs for the good”] is to justify the words ‘that which he desired,’ it is carelessly written; we should have ‘for the one and the other aspire to do *more* good,’ my emphasis). For a helpful discussion of the interpretive possibilities for Aristotle’s use of *hamillaomai*, see Stern-Gillet, *Friendship*, 116-8. For the reasons I discuss below, I’m more confident than she is that Aristotle means that they two friends are competing with each other to show that they are the more virtuous friend.

⁹⁶ NE 4.3.1124b9-12. Aristotle also speaks of competition concerning noble deeds in NE 9.8: “all people *competing* with a view to what is noble and straining to do the most noble deeds, there would be both in common and for each person individually all the things that are needed as well as the greatest of goods.” (NE 1169a8-9, my emphasis).

⁹⁷ That friendship sometimes involves this sort of competition is also observed by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* (2.4.1381b21-3). Plato dramatically depicts this point in the *Lysis* (207b8-c6).

⁹⁸ Aristotle, 5th ed. (London: Methuen and Company, 1949), 230, my emphasis. Kant (*Lectures on Ethics*, ed. Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind, trans. Peter Heath [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 184) and Kierkegaard (*Works of Love*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995], 53-5) deny that friendship is a source of selfless motivation for similar reasons. Ross’ assessment of Aristotle’s analysis of friendship is shared by Gauthier and Jolif (*L’Éthique*, comment on 1158b25), Christopher Gill (“Altruism or Reciprocity in Greek Ethical Philosophy?,” in *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*, ed. Christopher Gill, Norman Postlethwaite, and Richard Seaford [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998] 318, bottom paragraph), and possibly Pangle (*Friendship*, 79, 89, first paragraph, 126-7). As I mentioned above (see note 88), it’s somewhat unclear whether she ultimately thinks that Aristotle extends the requirement of an equal return to all virtuous friendships.

virtuous friends were selflessly motivated to benefit each other, then their friendships should be exempt from the need of a return benefit from their friend. The mere performance of a benefaction, or the resulting happiness of the friend, or whatever exactly the selfless motivation is, should itself be enough for the friend who provides the benefit. But Aristotle, by observing that the need for an equal return of benefits extends even to the friendships of virtuous people, denies that this is the case.⁹⁹

Michael Pakaluk, on the other hand, attempts to preserve the unconstrained character of friendly giving in virtuous friendships despite the requirement of an equal return. He offers an interpretation in which virtuous friends, by taking turns benefiting each other “not on condition of...receiving anything back in return,”¹⁰⁰ temporarily take on the role of a superior friend, who, as a superior, does not expect a strictly equal return, but “does count his good service as reciprocated (as *per* the analysis of [Book VIII] Chs. 7 and 8) if it is answered by the appropriate gratitude and friendly affection of the recipient.”¹⁰¹ Pakaluk motivates this interpretation by the following two considerations: (i) as we saw above, Aristotle states that virtuous friends should pay each other back in terms of love, but such friends are already in a position to reciprocate with the same sorts of benefits while the return of love was introduced as a proxy return that

⁹⁹ Note that Aristotle also upholds the need for a virtuous benefactor to get a return in friendships between unequals (see NE 8.7.1158b23-8, 8.14.1163a24-12). That he does so is also the view of Aspasius (*Commentaria*, 185, lines 11-12, note “honored as virtuous”, [*timasthai*] *hōs enareton*, 186, lines 11-23, note “that is, the virtuous person,” (*ēgoun ho agathos*) and Irwin (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 288, notes to chapter 14, paragraphs §2 and §3). Michael Pakaluk, on the other hand, argues on the basis of Aristotle’s claim that the friendships of virtuous people are not characterized by complaints (NE 8.13.1162b6-9) that we should not read Aristotle’s statements about “the more virtuous” and “virtue” in these passages in his own voice, but in the voice of a superior friend who, thinking himself to be virtuous, but not being so, disputes about a reward or return that he (falsely) thinks he is entitled to (*Books VIII and IX*, 143-7). No doubt, Pakaluk is uncomfortable with the degree to which Aristotle depicts virtuous people as concerned with rewards or returns, but he is clearly reading the text against the grain. Aristotle points to the virtuous person’s concern for a reward or return throughout the NE; see 1.9.1099b16-18, 3.5.1113b22-6, 3.6.1115a28-32, 4.3.1123b15-1124a9, 4.3.1124b9-12 and note *prosophlēsei* (“owe in addition”), 5.6.1134b1-8, 10.8.1178a28-34 with Aquinas, *Commentary*, 2118.

¹⁰⁰ *Books VIII and IX*, 106.

¹⁰¹ Same page as above, his emphasis.

allows for friendship between unequals¹⁰² and (ii) the presence of exchange calls into question the generosity of the gifts of virtue friends, which Aristotle elsewhere seems to uphold.¹⁰³ But I don't think that these are sufficient motivation for his interpretation. Concerning (i), we do not need to adopt this interpretation in order to make sense of why the return of love helps preserve equal virtue friendships. If, as Aristotle claims and Pakaluk grants,¹⁰⁴ "being loved" is itself a good, then, a friend, by loving his virtuous friend, provides him with a good that, like the other benefits in their friendship, requires an equal return, namely, being equally loved in return. And concerning (ii), the interpretation does not actually resolve the difficulty. It merely shifts the requirement of a return in virtuous friendship from a strictly equal to, as in the norm for friendships between unequals, a proportionally equal one.¹⁰⁵

The degree to which Aristotle thinks that virtuous friends fall short of being selflessly disposed toward each other is perhaps clearest through a comparison with his account of the love of mothers for their children. He claims that mothers love their children "without seeking to be loved in return, if both [understand: the happiness of their children and being loved by them in return] should not be possible, but it seems to be enough for them if they see them doing well."¹⁰⁶ To then illustrate this point, he points to the example of mothers who give away their children to be raised by others and "love them even though they distribute to them none of the things it is fitting to give a mother on account of their ignorance [of who their mothers actually are]."¹⁰⁷ Thus, mothers, by loving and benefiting their children without requiring a return,

¹⁰² See Pakaluk, *Books VIII and IX*, 105; NE 8.7.1158b23-33, 8.8.1159a33-1159b2.

¹⁰³ See Pakaluk, same page as above; NE 8.13.1162b31-3, 8.13.1163a4-5.

¹⁰⁴ See note 91.

¹⁰⁵ See note 102. In all fairness, Pakaluk attempts (unsuccessfully in my view) to mitigate Aristotle's claims about the requirement of a return in unequal friendships that involve virtuous people. For more on this point, see note 99.

¹⁰⁶ NE 8.8.1159a30-1.

¹⁰⁷ NE 8.8.1159a32-3.

present a standard of loving and benefiting another that virtuous friends, by requiring one, fall short of.¹⁰⁸

At this point, it may be wondered how the requirement of an equal return of benefits is consistent with Aristotle's view that friends primarily aim at living life together. If friends are sufficiently motivated to benefit each other in order that they may share a good life together, why would they also require an additional return? Isn't the "payment" of sharing life together enough? Aristotle does not deny that it is possible to imagine a friendship that consists entirely of living life together and does not include any proper exchange of benefits.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, as we have seen, he holds this activity to be the heart of friendship. Let me therefore suggest the following. Though sharing life together is the central activity of friendship, it is practically difficult to limit one's friendship to this activity. Given the neediness and vulnerability of human life,¹¹⁰ it is very useful for us to have others with whom we can reliably exchange favors. And especially those who (a) are reliably present for us and (b) who we trust. But such are our friends.¹¹¹ Therefore, it is extremely common for friends to fall into the habit of exchanging favors with each other.¹¹² But, as soon as they do, they step beyond their "original" motivation for benefiting each other—sharing life together—and cannot help but begin to expect a return. And it is this less essential, but extremely common, aspect of friendship that Aristotle explores under the heading of "equality."

¹⁰⁸ Consider NE 9.4.1166a2-9 and note the use of mothers as an example. That mothers serve as a standard of love for Aristotle is observed by Pakaluk (*Books VIII and IX*, 102, bottom) and Pangle (*Friendship*, 86, bottom paragraph and following with 95, second paragraph). Note, however, that even mothers don't love their children selflessly but as extensions of themselves; see NE 8.12.1161b27-9; compare 5.6.1134b9-12.

¹⁰⁹ See NE 8.6.1158a22-3.

¹¹⁰ See NE 8.14.1154b9-12.

¹¹¹ See NE 8.3.1156b25-32, 8.4.1157a20-4.

¹¹² See NE 8.6.1158a25-7, 9.9.1169b6-7.

We are now in a position to address a contrary piece of evidence that I alluded to earlier.¹¹³ There is one place where Aristotle seems to say that true friends do not benefit each other on the condition of a return. In discussing quarrels that occur in merely instrumental friendships, he distinguishes between “character” (*ēthikē*) and “law-like” (*nomikē*) forms of these friendships. The second form rests on an explicit statement of the terms of exchange (*epi rētois*). The first form “does not rest on statements [of terms], but something is given *as to a friend*, or in whatever other way, but he thinks he is worthy of getting back what is equal, or more, on the grounds that he has not given something away, but made a sort of loan.”¹¹⁴ In other words, this form of useful friendship is confused. The giver is deceived about his current (or future) motivations in the friendship.¹¹⁵ The important point, however, is that the standard of friendly giving that the giver falls short of is one that does not need a return. As Aristotle says, the recipient of the gift was not given something “*by a friend*, and neither did he [the one who gave] do this on account of itself.”¹¹⁶ However, it follows from my interpretation that virtuous friends do benefit their friends on the condition that these benefits will be returned. How, then, do I make sense of Aristotle’s apparent claim to the contrary?¹¹⁷

I will address this difficulty in two ways. First, we have seen that there are two circumstances in which virtuous friends do not require a return, namely, when they are competing with each other to prove their superior virtue and when their benefits advance the goal of sharing life together. Therefore, virtuous friends do sometimes satisfy the condition of giving without requiring a return, though they do not always do so. This brings me to my second point.

¹¹³ See note 87.

¹¹⁴ See NE 8.13.1162b31-3.

¹¹⁵ See NE 8.13.1162b34-1163a1. On the various ways of reading the self-deception, see Pakaluk, *Books VIII and IX*, 139.

¹¹⁶ NE 8.13.1163a4-5, my emphasis.

¹¹⁷ The tension between these two parts of Aristotle’s account of friendship is well observed by Pakaluk (*Books VIII and IX*, 105-6). However, as I have argued, there are difficulties with his proposed solution.

To claim that something is a condition of “true” friendship is not to claim that actual friends always live up to it. As Kant puts it, “No friendship ever matches the Idea of friendship...for it is not in fact possible. But the Idea is true, nonetheless.”¹¹⁸ And this is one thing, I submit, that Aristotle is trying to show us—actual friends in the world do not wholly live up to the popular idealizations about friendship.¹¹⁹ This is perhaps why he will eventually argue, despite the fact that friendship is understood to be an interpersonal relationship,¹²⁰ that each person is their own greatest friend.¹²¹ For in the case of our relationship with ourselves we at least find a genuine example of the unconditional love that was thought to be a characteristic of “true” friendship.¹²²

VI

Aristotle holds that the ultimate goal of human action is each person’s own happiness (“psychological eudaimonism”). Among scholars who accept this interpretation, it is widely thought that he never attempts to defend this view, despite its controversial character. The most common explanation for this fact is that psychological eudaimonism was Ancient Greek common sense. Unlike us, the Greeks took it for granted that everyone acts ultimately for the sake their own happiness. Aristotle’s view of human motivation therefore did not appear to him to need a defense. I have argued elsewhere that this picture of Ancient Greek common sense is wrong; psychological eudaimonism was controversial in Ancient Greece, just as it is today. Nevertheless, the fact that psychological eudaimonism rationally requires a defense doesn’t imply that Aristotle,

¹¹⁸ Kant, *Ethics*, 185.

¹¹⁹ This is also the view of Ronna Burger (*Aristotle’s Dialogue with Socrates: On the Nicomachean Ethics* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008], 162, bottom paragraph). For more evidence that Aristotle recognizes a popular “ideal” of friendship, consider his use of the phrase “and all the other things that people think are worthy of true friendship” at NE 8.5.115723-4.

¹²⁰ See EE 6.6.1240a7-15.

¹²¹ See NE 9.8.1168b9-10.

¹²² For the point that unconditional love was thought to be part of friendship, see NE 8.3.1156a16-19 and note that Aristotle is describing a friendly love where the friend is loved “insofar as he exists” (*hēi ho philoumenos estin*) and “insofar as he is *the very one he is*” (*hēi stin hosper estin ho philoumenos*)—that is, loving Socrates insofar as he exists or insofar as he is Socrates. For the point that each individual has this sort of love towards himself, see NE 9.4.1166a19-22, 9.4.1168b2-4; EE 6.5.1240b4-6.

or any other Greek philosopher for that matter, actually defends it. In this paper, I have offered reason to think that he does. I focused on how, in the NE, he raises, and then responds to, a credible challenge to psychological eudaimonism. This challenge is the popular view that virtuous people act in disregard of their own good, especially in relation to their friends. His response is that there are (observable) facts that speak against this view. I then suggested that these alleged facts can be found in his surrounding discussion of friendship. To bolster the plausibility of this idea, I pointed out that there was a popular connection between the selflessness of virtuous people and friendship—virtue issues in noble actions, but at least some, and perhaps all, noble actions were popularly thought to be selfless. But selfless action require selfless motivation, and friendship was popularly thought to be one of its greatest sources. It was thus popularly thought that friendship provides the context for some of the most selfless actions of virtue. I then distinguished two ways that Aristotle’s investigation of friendship could provide evidence against the popular view that virtue involves selflessness. The first, and weaker, way is by providing evidence that friendship is not a source of selfless motivation. This would eliminate one prominent source of selfless motivation, but it wouldn’t rule out that there were *other* sources of selfless motivation that virtuous people could draw on. The second, and stronger, way is by providing evidence that virtuous friends don’t selflessly benefit each other tout court. This would be evidence that there aren’t *any* sources of selfless motivation available to virtuous people when they act towards their friend. Regarding the first way, I pointed to two such observations—that friendship dissolves after prolonged distance and that we don’t wish for our friends to become gods. Regarding the second, I pointed to Aristotle’s observation that friendship, including the friendship of virtuous people, requires an equal return of benefits in order to preserve itself.

I do not think, however, that this exhausts Aristotle's defense of psychological eudaimonism. As I mentioned before, my goal in this paper hasn't been to provide an exhaustive account of his defense; rather, it's been to open the door to this sort of investigation by pointing to a plausible example of a defense. Further areas for investigation include Aristotle's treatment of other popular sources of selfless motivation besides friendship—for example, love of one's country or patriotism—as well as additional evidence that virtuous people do not act selflessly. In my view, a fruitful place to look for the latter is his treatment of virtue and rewards. It's an under-appreciated fact that he holds that virtuous actions make one deserving of rewards¹²³ as well as that he provides an analysis of the grounds of this desert. In short, he views rewards as serving the purpose of making an interaction equally worthwhile for both parties involved. They are therefore owed to a virtuous benefactor on the condition that he got less out of his (virtuous) benefaction than his beneficiary.¹²⁴ Combined with the fact that virtuous actions are agreed by virtuous people to make one deserving of beneficial rewards, this analysis calls into question the selflessness of virtuous benefactions, which may explain Aristotle's surprising statement near the conclusion of the NE that virtuous actions are not chosen for their own sake.¹²⁵ But further discussion of these issues will have to wait for another occasion.

¹²³ See note 99.

¹²⁴ See NE 8.14.1163b1-12.

¹²⁵ See NE 10.7.1177b16-18.